



# & Workers' Liberty Solidarity

For social ownership of the banks and industry

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## Unions, workers, local activists

# TAKE

The revival of the Labour Party has raised the hopes of millions. To continue and consolidate progress, the revival must be linked to renewed labour-movement democracy.

Both the top-down structural changes, and the manipulative culture, of the Blair-Brown New Labour era, must be reversed. Only with a transformation in the unions, too, can renewal be thorough; but the Labour Party's democracy review, mandated by its September 2017 conference and now underway, creates openings. On our centre pages this week: briefing and discussion on what the left should push for.

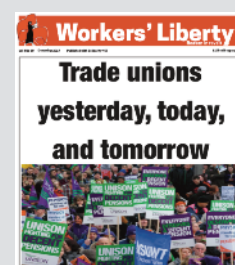
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# CONTROL OF LABOUR!



## Inside:

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### Yemen: end this war!



After the killing of Saleh, Dan Katz reports on the situation in Yemen.

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# Landlords profit from right to buy

By Gemma Short

**Four in ten former council homes bought under the Right to Buy scheme are now owned by private landlords.**

The data, obtained by industry magazine *Inside Housing* from 111 local authorities using a Freedom of Information request, shows how Thatcher's scheme has decimated social housing stock. In the councils surveyed, a total of 180,260 leasehold properties had been sold under the Right to Buy since 1980. Of these, 72,454 are now registered with an "away address", meaning they are not occupied by the owner.

The figure varied amongst local authorities, but was as high as 70.9% of former right-to-buy homes now out for private rent in Milton Keynes.

Rent is significantly higher in the

private sector. Average social rent is £88 per week in England, while private rents are £210, a difference of £120. In London this rises to £108 for average social rent and £359 for private, a difference of £251. The irony for many local councils is that the Right to Buy scheme sees them subsidising private landlords as more housing benefit recipients are in private rentals. *Inside Housing* estimates that £9bn housing benefit a year is paid to private landlords.

## TOTAL

**A total of 1.5 million former council homes have now been sold under Right to Buy since the scheme's introduction.**

Most have not been replaced. Labour estimates that only one in five Right to Buy homes has been replaced. In 2012 the government overhauled the Right to Buy

scheme and promised a one-for-one replacement on any additional council homes bought above the average sales per year up until that point. However figures from the House of Commons Library show that an increasing gulf is emerging between homes sold and new acquisitions or building plans started.

According to the National Audit Office: "To meet the target of replacing the roughly 8,512 homes sold in 2014-15 by the end of 2017-18 would require quarterly housing starts to reach around 2,130, a five-fold increase on recent figures of approximately 420 per quarter."

Even worse, *Inside Housing's* data shows that only 48% of the replacements being built were at social rents. The rest slip in under the misnamed "affordable rent", which in reality is 80% of market rate and no real replacement for social housing.



# Obamacare undermined

By Rhodri Evans

**As well as legislating a big redistribution of income from workers to the rich, the US Republicans' "tax reform", now (mid-December) being pummelled into final shape to unite versions from the two houses of Congress, undermines "Obamacare".**

*Socialist Worker* (US) reports that the "reform" promises "a further crisis of the health care system caused by the repeal of the Obamacare mandate requiring individuals to buy insurance."

"From the point of view of the insurance companies, the ACA [Obamacare] exchanges put them in the position of offering policies to too many 'high-risk' consumers [with] chronic or serious health conditions

compared to 'low-risk' customers who need only minimal care.

"The ACA's solution to this problem for the health care industry was the 'individual mandate', which requires most Americans to either purchase health insurance or pay a tax penalty.

"Insurance providers such as Aetna and UnitedHealth had already decided — before Trump came along to add extra uncertainty — that the system wasn't profitable enough... UnitedHealth made the decision to exit the ACA exchanges last year..."

**Without enough companies in the "exchanges", the system collapses. The number without health insurance in the USA (around 30 million) has already started rising again, even before the mandate repeal.**



# Catalonia goes to the polls

By Tony Holmes

**The constitutional crisis in Catalonia continues to simmer as the region awaits elections on 21 December.**

A number of Catalan politicians and activists, including members of the recently dismissed government, have been denied bail and remain jailed on charges of sedition. Some are in exile in Belgium.

The Spanish government has been directly administering Catalonia now since late October. While there have been large-scale demonstrations against the suspension of regional autonomy and political arrests, the civil disobedience among local government and regional police that some predicted has failed to materialise.

Despite, or maybe because of, the heavy-handed, almost calculatedly bullish behaviour of the Spanish authorities, it seems that

support for Catalan independence and pro-independence parties may be on the wane. Although the electoral system favours pro-independence small towns and villages over less-separatist Barcelona, early-December polls have predicted a loss in seats for the pro-independence ERC (Republican Left) and Puigdemont's Junts Pel Sí coalition from 62 seats in the 2015 election to maybe fewer than 60. The main beneficiaries may be the neo-liberals of Ciudadanos. Both the left-wing independence party the CUP, as well as the alliance of Podemos and Catalunya en Comú (which opposes both independence and the Spanish crackdown) have held fairly steady.

Given the thuggish behaviour of the Spanish government, this may seem surprising. But equally, support for independence was only ever a minority position. Many who voted for pro-independence

parties as a protest against the status quo may have been repelled by Puigdemont's rush to declare independence with scant democratic mandate, or scared off by Madrid's hardline response. More still may simply be sick of the chaos the crisis has generated.

Unlike others on the left, *Workers' Liberty* has been critical of the drive for independence, while condemning Spanish repression. Along with much of the labour movement and left in Catalonia and the rest of the country, we continue to believe that the creation of a new border between the workers of Spain would be a backward step.

But above all, we demand the question be resolved democratically by the people of Catalonia themselves.

**That means an end to repression, the release of political prisoners and the restoration of Catalan autonomy.**

# Local government pay offer

By Will Sefton

**The local government employers have proposed a two year pay offer for council and school support staff workers of 2% in 2018 and a further 2% in 2019.**

Unison, GMB and Unite, as the largest unions representing local government workers, will now put the offer to their respective committees for consideration.

Initial statements from the three unions suggest they at least partially welcome a wage rise that is above the 1% pay cap, but it is well below the level needed to restore anywhere like the 20% cut that workers have faced since 2010.

The last national strike action

taken in local government over pay was a single day of strike action in 2014. The three unions then settled for the deal and laid blame at the door of union members for not being able to mobilise effective strike action.

More recently, when Unison members voted for action over pay in a consultative ballot, they were stopped before the matter could even be referred to the committee that could authorise industrial action.

**Getting the turnout needed for national strike action to be a reality will mean coordinating now, with a lively campaign and one that makes members believe the three unions aim to win.**



# Yemen: end this war!

By Dan Katz

**Saudi Arabia's war on Yemen, which began in 2015 in an effort to prop up the regime of President Abdrabbuh Mansour Hadi against internal rebellion, is a disaster for Yemen's people.**

The Saudis put together a coalition of Gulf States, and with US and UK support began a brutal, pulverising war on Yemen.

There have been over 13,000 victims of Saudi bombing, but many more have died as a consequence of the coalition's strategy. Hospitals, schools, factories and basic infrastructure have also been destroyed, and there is a major humanitarian crisis in the country. The Saudi have damaged the airport in the capital, Sanaa, and blown up the cranes at the port of Hodeida.

The biggest, fastest spreading cholera outbreak in modern history is now sweeping across Yemen. By the end of the year one million people are expected to have contracted cholera, including 600 000 children. Thousands have died already and the crisis is due simply to the destruction of Yemen's water and sanitation systems.

Yemen's government stopped funding healthcare in 2016, meaning those local health centres that do survive are staffed by workers who are not being paid; most healthcare is now provided by international agencies.

The Saudis have contempt for the rules of war, bombing 40 health centres during the first six months of their military campaign and, at one point, declaring the entire city of Saada, home to 50 000 civilians, a military target. The Gulf states have also stopped boats with humanitarian aid and medicine docking in Yemen's ports.

20 million people in the country now need humanitarian assistance. One million have fled Yemen and over 2.5 million are internally displaced.

The core of the anti-Hadi forces is the Shia Houthi movement which has its base in the country's



Former President of Yemen Ali Abdullah Saleh

north. The Houthis, until recent weeks, were in an alliance with former President Ali Abdullah Saleh.

Previously, in a series of wars between 2004 and 2010, Saleh – president during this period – had been in conflict with the Houthis. However Saleh – an utterly corrupt opportunist who continued to control some of Yemen's armed forces – allied himself with the Houthis to oust Hadi.

The Saudis are paranoid about Iranian backing for the Houthis. Although Iran does not control the Houthi movement, it is arming it with missiles and mines.

## DEAL

**Both the Houthis and Saleh had negotiated, privately, with the Saudis. The Houthi leader, Abdel-Malik al-Houthi, is seen as a "moderate", and Saleh was worried about being cut out of any deal the Houthis would make.**

This led to battles in Sanaa in August between Houthi and Saleh's forces.

A renewed burst of fighting between Houthis and Saleh's forces took place over the past week after Saleh switched sides. Saleh and the Secretary-General of Saleh's politi-

cal party, the GPC, Aref al-Zouka, were killed by the Houthis on 4 December and the Houthi forces now have complete control of the capital.

When US President Trump visited Saudi Arabia in May he agreed to sell them \$110 billion of weapons. The UK is also selling arms to the Saudis.

UK armaments firms sold £836m of arms and military hardware to Saudi Arabia between April and June 2017, up from £280m between January and March. It is shameful that the UK has sold itself to the disgusting Saudi regime and is backing a war in which every side is reactionary and venal and the human cost is so terrible.

The US and UK have also blocked UN investigations into war crimes.

None of the contending parties involved in the war in Yemen should be supported. The war and Saudi blockade should end.

Britain should stop its political support for Saudi Arabia, and stop weapon sales to the Saudis and their Gulf allies.

**Britain should send aid to alleviate the humanitarian disaster in Yemen.**

# Labor wins in Queensland

By Chris Reynolds

**Final results of the state election in Queensland, Australia, on 25 November have been announced. Labor, which was reduced to a tiny rump in 2012 after pursuing privatisations, and scraped back into office in 2015, now has a clear majority.**

The new parliament is 48 Labor, 39 LNP (conservatives), 3 Katter's Australia Party (populists), one

each for Greens and One Nation, and one independent.

David Greene, legal officer for the Queensland branch of the Maritime Union of Australia (wharfies and seafarers), who was himself a candidate in the election, has written in the MUA branch newsletter:

"LNP has had a catastrophic election, with a massive swing against it in almost all seats. This election was also a rejection of One Nation and Trump style populism here in Australia..."

"The success of the Australian Labor Party's [ALP's] campaign was in linking the LNP and One Nation, which proved toxic to the LNP in [more urbanised] South East Queensland. It also helped, however, that the ALP was a credible alternative for dis-affected liberal [small-l] voters..."

**"The MUA Queensland Branch now has more influence within the ALP... We can... use our influence to achieve results in Government".**

# Mauritius socialists plan Diego Garcia protest



An earlier Lalit protest over Diego Garcia

By Gerry Bates

**On Friday 8 December a demonstration in Mauritius calling for the huge US military base in Diego Garcia (in the Indian Ocean) to be shut down, and the archipelago's inhabitants to be allowed to return. On Thursday afternoon, the demonstration was banned.**

The Chagos archipelago, of which Diego Garcia is part, was ruled by Britain. After Mauritius became independent, Britain bought the archipelago backed and forcibly evicted its inhabitants, between 1968 and 1973, to make way for the US base.

The Mauritian socialist organisation Lalit is part of a "Komitee Diego" (Diego Garcia Committee), which also includes a women's organisation, the Muvman Liberasyon Fam, a trade union federation, the Confederation des Travailleurs du Secteur Privé, and a neighbourhood association, Muvman pu Progre Ros Bwa.

The committee organised the demonstration following Britain's (94-15 defeat) at the UN General Assembly last year in its attempt to block an International Court of Justice case, as proposed by the African Union. As Lalit says, "we need to put on the agenda the need to close down the Diego Garcia base, and all imperialist military bases for that matter. This is a crying need when there is someone like President Donald Trump as Commander in Chief".

Lindsey Collen of Lalit told *Solidarity*: "For all demonstrations organisers have to inform the police at least eight days before the protest. The police then have 48 hours... to raise any objection..."

"There is one exception. You can't hold a demonstration in the Capital on a day that Parliament sits, without written authorisation

from the Police Commissioner. Parliament sits on Tuesdays according to its standing orders. However, when the National Assembly adjourned on Tuesday, they fixed a special session for Friday, the day of our march... The Police Commissioner issued a letter which amounts to prohibition under the law...

"The government will have to pay a political price for prohibiting a march on the Diego Garcia issue.

"We then held a gathering of about 75 people on the social centre veranda, where the march was to start from, while two members went to deliver an open letter of protest to Prime Minister Pravind Jugnauth against the base and his seeking money for it [as compensation, instead of restoring the inhabitants' rights]..."

"The anti-riot police had jeeps in front of the Social Centre, and a large Black Maria about 75 metres up the road. But they did not act against our gathering, so long as it did not go outside the gates. On the Diego Garcia issue, the State will not want to pay the political price that any physical force against us would entail (my personal guess).

"The national press were present in impressive numbers, and it was written up, on radio and bits on TV sites. So, your letter of support (we received seven in all — from organisations in Namibia, USA, UK, India, France) was particularly important to us — with our demonstration being prohibited.

**"At our gathering, we took a resolution together that today's gathering is a rehearsal for the real demonstration... probably next year..."**

• For a solidarity message sent by Workers' Liberty see [bit.ly/2BFbt3j](http://bit.ly/2BFbt3j)



# Socialist feminism without the socialism

By Cathy Nugent

The setting up of a socialist feminist network/website ([www.socfem.net](http://www.socfem.net)) should have been worth investigating.

But a look at its contents indicates that the network/website has been set up purely to voice concerns over forthcoming possible amendments to the Gender Recognition Act (GRA), specifically that transgender people will be able to register a change of gender by “self declaration”.

The site includes a Q&A on the GRA and promotion of a new campaign — Women’s Place UK. That campaign’s statement says that while it supports transgender rights it believes self-declaration may undermine the integrity of women-only spaces; in the forthcoming consultation on the GRA women’s groups (unspecified) should be consulted.

I disagree with this stance against self-declaration. If self-definition (and thereby self-declaration in a registering process) is a false or insufficient basis on which people should be allowed to live their lives, in this case be a woman, what do you put in its place? It can only be a more or less elaborate system of institutionalised vetting procedures where a transwoman is not a “good enough” woman, a semi-woman, and second class citizen, who can never gain entry to parts of society that other women have automatic access to.

But these arguments have been dealt with in previous issues of *Solidarity* (448 and 452) and are not what I want to take up here. As a socialist feminist I was annoyed by the description of socialist feminism which the site puts forward. For brevity, I’ll focus on this statement from the Q&A:

“Feminists do not conflate sex and gender. Sex is a scientific term for one’s biology, and this cannot be changed. As materialists we believe the root of women’s oppression lies in her biology, a view underpinning socialist theory for generations. Gender theory does not provide an alternative credible analysis and it is regressive. Queer theorists see the intimate connection between biological sex and oppression and react by trying to dismantle the notion of biological sex whilst socialists and feminists react by seeking to dismantle oppression.”

I agree that biological sex and gender should not be conflated, but that is hardly controversial.



Is there a conflation of sex and gender?

If there is an increasing conflation of the two categories in the world it is in ordinary discourse: “What’s your gender, male or female?” asks the official form. To which the only reply is with annotation in the margin of the form, “female is my biological sex!”.

## CONFLATION

**But I see no evidence that queer theorists and gender theorists (which I take to mean academic writing of a certain kind) make that conflation.**

In fact, by sometimes obsessively looking at how sex, gender and sexuality do not match up, or are not socially represented in neat and “normal” patterns, and by focussing on the fluidity of gender and sexuality, those awful gender theorists (Judith Butler is coming, run for the hills!) may, arguably, be doing good work in stopping conflation between sex and gender.

Perhaps the pop at queer theorists and gender theorists is an unstated (and thus dishonest) criticism of some trans activists who do

indeed try to dismantle the notion of biological sex. On the other hand, for some, questioning may be a fairer description of the trans activist’s argument. On her blog trans activist Mey Valdivia Rude says “sex isn’t the Ultimate Biological Reality” and argues biological sex is a composite reality where the component parts — internal genitalia, external genitalia and gonads — don’t always match up. She stretches her point quite a lot, but there is a rational core to the point.

In her latest book *Testosterone Rex*, Cordelia Fine argues that while sex differences between biological males and females are important and interesting, they are often counter-intuitive, and differ radically from social expectations (or, dare we say it, are socially constructed). Differences between sexes have to be understood alongside difference within sexes, range across many different human physical functions, are much more rarely linked to human behaviours than we might imagine and include a vast range of small, essentially very small, and very relative differences. Fine says:

“Humans... rank pretty low on the Spectacular Bodily Sex Differences Scale. As [the sociologist] Lisa Wade points out, ‘If we were as sexually dimorphic as the elephant seal, the average human male would tower six feet above the average woman and weigh 550 pounds.’”

One of Fine’s underlying arguments seems very relevant here. Humans, she says, are adaptive animals. Our biology tells the story of that adaptation. Across a human history where male and female humans have worked together collectively to produce a subsistence.

This argument is relevant to my main objection to the next statement which I think is crude and misleading about women’s oppression, socialist and socialist feminist politics: “As materialists we believe the root of women’s oppression lies in her biology, a view underpinning socialist theory for generations”.

Women’s biology is not the root of our oppression at all! And it has never been the underpinning of socialist theory.

Socialist feminism in the modern women’s movement (from the late 60s), was based on an understanding that women’s oppression was rooted in a lethal combination of class and socially constructed sexual differences — that is gender. Or more precisely there was a division of labour in society organised around biological sex — women bore and raised children, and did certain kinds of waged labour, which was justified on certain assumed innate capacities (gender ideology). The division of labour was embedded in class-based (and latterly capitalist) social production and was useful for capitalists.

## THEORY

**The theory was based on Engels’ summary of anthropological evidence about how class society arose alongside the conversion of a benign sexual division of labour (matriarchy, Engels thought, wrongly as it turns out, but only somewhat), into a key mechanism of women’s oppression.**

This development took place over millennia, at different rates across the world, but roughly coinciding with the transition from hunter gathering societies to horticultural and/or more intensive agricultural production.

There were a vast range of lively debates about how the combination of class and sex/gender worked, whether it compromised on the importance of patriarchy in causing human misery, whether the housewife was a new political subject (Wages for Housework), how the family wage functioned and the treachery of the trade union bureaucracy, and last but not least whether the anthropological evidence Engels had to go on could still be relied on.

**But never was it said that socialist theory rested on a biological reductionism. One can only argue that if you neither know about or care about the richness of the socialist feminist tradition or only want, for another political purpose, to raise the importance of the biological above the complexities of human society. That is not the socialist project.**

## NCAFC commits to 2018 NSS boycott

By Ruairidh Anderson

**The National Campaign Against Fees and Cuts (NCAFC) held its winter conference in Liverpool on 9-10 December.**

The conference voted to recommit to the National Student Survey Boycott for 2018, for solidarity with trans activists against prejudice and harassment, and to orientate itself to the “cut the rent” campaigns and workers’ struggles springing up across the country this term. The conference also debated free speech and no platform tactics. The policy passed at the conference can be found online at [anticuts.com](http://anticuts.com).

This conference saw the latest generational turnover, with several longstanding

activists leaving the National Committee (NC) and a wave of new NC members coming in who had been involved in a variety of campus activism before this point.

This has given the NC a greater geographical spread across the country. Along with the plan for an upcoming NCAFC Scotland conference, this should act as the springboard for broadening NCAFC’s active membership.

**As it implements a strategy of tying in national activism against the Government more closely with local struggles that NCAFC activists are already involved with.**

• Read full report at [bit.ly/2z3LXm0](http://bit.ly/2z3LXm0)



# Norwegian, Swiss, or workers' road

**The Tories' deal with the EU to open talks on future trade links suggests that they are headed on the Norwegian or Swiss road.**

In February 2014 Switzerland voted in a referendum, by a narrow majority based outside the big cities, to mandate a constitutional amendment imposing quotas on immigration. Switzerland is currently in the Schengen passport-free area, and has a much higher rate of immigration than Britain.

By December 2016 the Swiss government had fixed a fudge. Swiss employers are now obliged to offer jobs first to job-seekers registered at Swiss job-centres. Those may be EU citizens who have registered there. No quotas are in sight.

Switzerland is not in the EU, and, since another narrow referendum result in 1992, not even in the looser European Economic Area. But, under a series of treaties negotiated in the late 1990s, it is committed to applying most of EU law in Switzerland.

The treaties stipulate that if one agreement falls, then they all fall. The EU told Switzerland that if it blocked freedom of movement for EU citizens, all its economic deals with the EU would fall. It suspended Swiss participation in some EU programs to show it was serious. The Swiss government sought a deal.

Norway voted, again narrowly, against EU membership in 1994. Successive Norwegian governments, without much controversy, then signed Norway up to the EEA, a wholesale version of what Switzerland has done by its linked treaties.

Norway has exemptions for its fishing industry, but has passport-free movement for EU citizens.

The Tory line now is that Britain will not be in the EU Single Market or Customs Union, but will have "regulatory alignment". Yet the Single Market is only the EU's system of regulatory alignment.

Norway and Switzerland opt out of some parts of the Single Market, but "align" with it by accepting the core standards.

Gung-ho right-wing Tories want a low-regulation, low-tax, few-worker-rights Britain. They believe the attraction for global capital of low social overheads would outweigh the new economic barriers between Britain and the EU.

But most of the Tory right wing is quiet now, and supporting Theresa May.

The shrewd big-business types who always thought new economic barriers were foolish now see the way clear to nudging the Tories into a very "soft" and delayed Brexit.

Britain is bigger than Norway and Switzerland, and has larger non-EU economic ties, notably with the USA. But, in the Trump era, the chances of a shared-markets deal with the USA strong enough to offset the loss to Britain of EU ties are small.

In the USA, much of Trump's voter appeal has been based on his economic protectionism. But nationalists in Britain usually favour trade deals in general. Almost all anti-EU ideologues promised more and better trade deals outside the EU, and not a walled-off Britain.

The Single Market was and remains popu-

lar even among Brexit voters. For example, an August poll found 66% saying that "the priority for the British Government when negotiating the UK's withdrawal from the EU should be maintaining access to the Single Market".

The same poll showed that if the choice is poised flatly — Single Market and free movement, or blocking migration and losing trade — a majority says Single Market and free movement is the better deal.

In other words, the reality that the productive forces generated by capitalism have grown so as to make its old national borders archaic and cramping has impressed itself, not just on socialists, who were saying that over a hundred years ago, but even on most conservatives.

All that is to the good. But still the Tories are fomenting anti-migrant prejudice. Still the Tories — maybe through the mass prejudice at their base against "soft" Brexit — may fumble their way to a destructive, anti-migrant, "hard" Brexit.

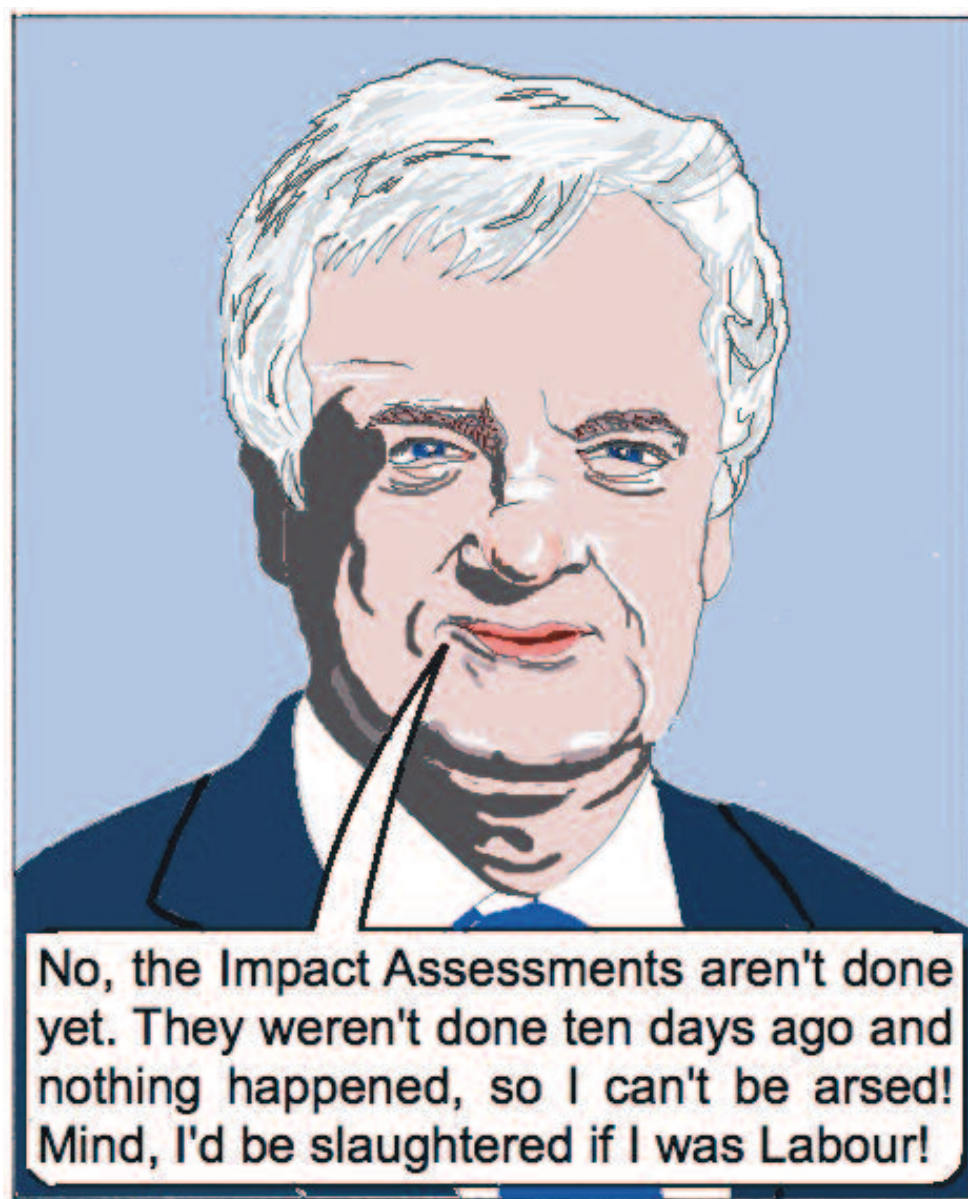
It should be Labour's job to counterpose a way forward: open borders, free movement, economic integration and social levelling-up.

Yet Labour's leaders are still equivocating. On 11 December shadow Chancellor John McDonnell said: "Remaining within the single market would not respect the referendum result".

He must know that the polls say otherwise. So he equivocated by saying that he is for "a", not "the" Single Market.

Of course EU Single Market regulations can be improved. But only from within the EU. It's as if in 1752, when Britain changed its calendar to fit with Europe, and there were riots in protest, someone should say: "We are for a single calendar, but not *the* single calendar". Or in the 1840s, when clock time was harmonised across England, and cities such as Bristol and Oxford resisted well into the 1850s, someone should say: "We want a single time, but not *the* single time".

McDonnell talked of "a single market, not the single market, and a customs union not the customs union, so therefore a reformed single market or a new negotiated relationship with the single market..."



"We want to be as close as we possibly can to ensure tariff-free access... as close a relationship with the single market as we can and possibly a customs union... We want to keep all the options on the table and that way we think we can protect the economy..."

**Labour's job should be to keep "on the table" the "option" of staying in the EU, making labour-movement links across Europe, and fighting for free movement, social levelling-up, and solidarity.**



## Posters, badges, and postcards

Workers' Liberty is producing a range of badges, postcards and posters to help our fundraising drive.

### Badges

Wear your revolutionary heart on your sleeve (or jumper) with our set of five badges — Karl Marx, Frederick Engels, Leon Trotsky, Rosa Luxemburg and Eleanor Marx.

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50p each when sold in person. Order a

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A set of 5 new A3 posters with the slogans "Defend free movement. Open the borders", "Occupy the houses of the rich", "Make capitalism history, fight for socialism", "Kill capitalism before it kills us", and "Defend abortion rights worldwide".

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**Solidarity will now have a break for Christmas and New Year. Solidarity 458 will be published on 10 January 2018.**



# How members can take co

By Keith Road

**The Labour Party is doing yet another “democracy review”.**

This time, however, the review comes under the leadership of Jeremy Corbyn and John McDonnell, and its coordinator is Katy Clark, formerly a left-wing Labour MP and someone we on *Solidarity* have known as a solid socialist back to her student days in Aberdeen and Edinburgh in the late 1980s and early 90s.

The deadline for “Phase 1” submissions is 12 January, and they are to cover BAME (black and minority-ethnic) Labour, Young Labour, and Labour Women’s Conference.

“Phase 2” (submissions by 23 March) covers more diffuse topics, such as “strengthening the involvement and participation of members”, but also specifically the governance of CLPs [constituency Labour Parties] and the place of Labour’s twenty affiliated “socialist societies”.

Phase 3 (by 29 June) will deal with the election of the party leader, the composition of the National Executive (NEC), the “policy

process”, local government, and Labour’s links with trade unions.

A “first report” is scheduled for Labour Party conference in September 2018. This should also include all remitted rule changes from the 2017 Labour Party conference. Delegates were assured they would all be considered during the review.

Ensuring that the democracy review is in itself run on democratic principles is important. We would encourage all CLPs, and union affiliates to put forward proposals, invite relevant NEC members and Katy Clark to address meetings and promote participation particularly from young members on the future of Young Labour.

## CONTROLS

**Previous reviews have almost totally ignored the submissions put forward. There is good reason to believe that this time will be different, but we should not be complacent.**

Fundamentally any move to greater democracy in the party must mean structures that put basic democratic controls into

the hands of members and local party units, with a responsive and accountable national structure that includes oversight of the parliamentary Labour Party and the way the leader and her or his team operate.

One of the great differences since Harold Wilson has been the increasing size and weight of the staff around the leader.

It was previously very easy for other insiders to speak to the leader. Now almost anyone can find it difficult to get past the praetorian guard of staff.

There is a remedy the sovereign decision-making body of the Labour Party. A conference with meaningful power that set the policy agenda and passes motions that are then included in the manifesto.

At the 2017 conference, Labour passed a number of good policies including the repeal of all existing anti-trade union laws since the conference there has been complete silence on the issue. Most members will not know about the policy, let alone plans for it be enacted by a Labour government. How and where can members get involved to turn the conference resolution into a living campaign, that can draw in support from the wider

labour movement and local parties?

There is no method at the moment for the policy to be realised. The frankly hollow and seemingly inept National Policy Forum never appears to consider conference policy when it submits its report to conference.

Conference is only one of several aspects being discussed. Already the scope of the review excludes selection procedures, which are one of the primary principles of a democratic and member-led party. We can see no good reason to be restricted by the official terms when submissions are made to the review.

At this stage we do not know with what level of scrutiny different submissions will receive. We have formulated a series of proposals covering the three stages of the review, and would be keen to work with others to promote these principles and discuss any other proposals.

**Submissions opened on 1 November and can be made either online at [labour.org.uk/about/democracy-review-2017/](http://labour.org.uk/about/democracy-review-2017/) or via email to [democracy@labour.org.uk](mailto:democracy@labour.org.uk).**

# Drawing on past debates and struggles

By Martin Thomas

**Ideas to go to the democracy review can be got from the work of the 2010-1 “Democracy Task Force”, launched by the Campaign for Labour Party Democracy but involving others, and run mainly by Jon Lansman, now leader of Momentum, and the present writer.**

The work of that “Task Force” was geared to a previous “democracy review”, ordered by Ed Miliband. Run by Peter Hain, that review ended up summarily binning the submissions it received — including the official submission from all Labour’s affiliated trade unions — and ramming through a series of mostly-regressive measures on a snap vote, with scarcely a few days’ prior notice, at the 2011 Labour Party conference.

The ideas binned by Hain are mostly still relevant today.

On Young Labour, the Task Force declared: “The revitalisation of Labour’s youth section at a national and local level is a precondition for renewal of the party and reinvigorating its campaigning potential... Autonomy is important for [its activity]. This requires:

- The establishment of Young Labour branches at CLP level under the supervision of the CLP, with representation at CLP meetings, and the freedom to campaign on issues it regards as important to young people, and to recruit new members.

- An annual Young Labour conference convened by the Young Labour National

Committee.

- A sabbatical salary for the elected chair of Young Labour, with office facilities, administrative support and adequate resources to maintain an effective and autonomous organisation.

- Adequate resources and administrative support for Young Labour at a national level, and full access to for Young Labour officers to membership lists at the appropriate level.

- Young Labour should be able to feed into party decision-making at all levels – constituency, regionally and nationally, into the... national executive and party conference.

- The Young Labour National Committee should be ex-officio delegates to Labour Party conference, and be entitled to move motions there which have been approved and prioritised by Young Labour conference”.

Three things can be added today. Young Labour should have its own constitution, decided by Young Labour conference. (At present the rules for Young Labour are made up arbitrarily by Labour head office, and changed from year to year).

The new Labour leadership should not only allow, but positively campaign for, the setting-up of constituency Young Labour groups. When a mostly right-wing Labour Party, trying to reverse a long period of decline, launched youth groups in 1960, within a short time (by Easter 1961) there were 721 of them, more than one per constituency.

With Labour Party membership buoyant today, and strong “Corbynism” among

young people, similar rapid growth could be got today, if only the Labour leaders would campaign for it.

That would also lay the basis for Young Labour conference to be a conference of delegates from Young Labour groups (as it was in previous times), rather than a mixture of delegates from CLPs, from often rather bureaucratic trade-union youth structures, and from student Labour Clubs, as today.

The 2011 text referred generally to “The strengthening of the women’s and BAME structure

## ACTIVE

**“There need to be active and representative women’s and BAME organisations at local (CLP), regional and national levels and at the moment there are neither”.**

The current rulebook licenses constituency women’s and BAME *forums*, rather than the women’s *sections* which had existed (I believe) from 1918 up to the Blair days, and the black ‘sections’ which existed unofficially in the 1980s. These “forums” are, by rule, run by officials elected by the whole CLP and have their activity controlled by the whole CLP. They lack the autonomy that the previous “sections” had, and are even now sparse and lifeless compared to the past.

“BAME Labour” is now a “socialist society”, but unlike all other “socialist societies” has direct representation on Labour’s National Policy Forum and NEC (currently the egregious right-winger Keith Vaz), and ex-of-

ficio representation at Labour conference.

The structural position of Labour’s affiliated “socialist societies” is a mess. Until 1918 Labour had no individual membership, and the “socialist societies” (ILP, Fabians, for a while the Marxist SDF and later the Marxist BSP) were the local-activist complement to the affiliated trade unions.

Now Labour has 20 “socialist societies”, ranging from “Labour Business” through “Chinese for Labour” to the “Labour Animal Welfare Society”. They are mostly small and have little representation in national structures.

Their status is open to abuse: if your local right-winger who has no support in her or his local branch does not turn up as a delegate from a union branch which never meets, she or he may instead arrive at your constituency General Committee or EC as from a newly-cooked-up and shadowy local branch of the “Labour Party Irish Society” or “Christians on the Left”.

Tidying all that up, however, seems difficult and not a priority for the left.

The 2011 text contained much detail about the NPF (it being considered unrealistic then to try to abolish it in the short term), but I think the left is now strong enough to say that the NPF (which has never worked even on its own terms) should be scrapped.

It also contained a fair bit of detail about the NEC. The main priority for the left there should be to make more explicit what was implied by the 2011 document, namely that the policy authority in the party should be



# Control of the Labour Party



the conference, or the NEC between conferences, and not the Leader's Office.

The main points from 2011 are important for what is now called the "policy process".

"The party's federalism is important at all levels: the traditional branch and GC structure can work well, enabling trade unions to be drawn into local activity and policy making, and we support retaining it – it helps to provide accountability and transparency..."

"Members must know they have a real voice in the party.

"Pluralism is important – diversity of opinion should be valued in a healthy democratic party..."

The 2011 document also focused on making Labour Party conference the central political authority in the party.

"A 'living breathing party' with a real functioning democracy requires that party conference has real debates and votes on the key issues, with decisions taken by the delegates representing the membership (individual and affiliated). A good indicator of a 'living breathing' conference is how much time is devoted to delegates' contributions. The Conference Arrangements Committee should ensure that at least half of conference's time is devoted to delegates contributions in debates on which votes are taken.

"Real functioning democracy' requires that members (individual and affiliated) are able, through their CLPs and Unions, to submit their policy proposals, have them considered, see the outcome and have them voted on. All motions for conference should be published online. Composites should be produced [well in advance of conference] on the most popular six topics amongst CLPs, based on the number of motions submitted on each topic, and another six for the affiliates (to ensure that smaller affiliates are also included).

"Each CLP and affiliate should also be able to submit a motion on issues of organisation, finance and campaigning and a rule change on any topic. Rule changes should be considered in the year they are submitted.

"[If the NPF is retained] conference should be able to consider minority positions from the NPF and amendments from CLPs and affiliates, or to take documents section by section.

"All party conference documents, including annual reports, policy documents, motions, records of decisions, votes and proceedings, should be published on Membersnet. National executive papers and minutes should be published on Membersnet, outside exceptional cases. Agendas should be published in full. The National Executive should return to the practice of taking questions and comments on all of its annual report at conference, and submitting it for the approval of conference, subject to the reference back of any parts with which conference disagrees.

"The party's rolling programme... approved by conference each year, shall be the basis of the party's election manifesto".

On rule changes, maybe we should also argue that the NEC should not be able to put rule changes through conference unless it has given the party due notice and allowed procedure for amending its rule-change proposals.

## SELECTIONS

**The new review does not cover selection of candidates. The 2011 document said:**

"There should be a renewed right of members to select all candidates prior to each election. This would mean that the selection (and reselection) of parliamentary candidates would be put on the same footing as that of all other candidates for election, except that we would accept that shortlists of one should be permitted for sitting MPs where there was only one nomination (a procedure which should replace the trigger ballot).

"For local government, as is already the case for parliament, candidates should no longer be required to have *prior* approval from the district, borough, city or county party..."

"Working-class representation in parliament, including amongst Labour MPs, has suffered badly in recent years, and this needs to be addressed. It is a good reason to resist any reduction in the role of trade unions in the nominations process, although trade unions do need to ensure that they are encouraging their working-class members, shop stewards and lay officials, to stand as well as their political officers, researchers and legal advisers. The provision of training is an important aspect of increasing the numbers of working class, women and BAME MPs".

In local government, the "Local Campaign Forums" set up to replace borough Labour Parties, local government committees, etc., under the Hain-Miliband changes of 2011, should be scrapped and replaced by the old structures.

In the 1980s, some left-wing Labour council groups gave the ultimate authority in their decisions to joint meetings of the council group and the local government committee or borough Labour Party. That system was outlawed by Labour Party rules later in the 1980s, but should be made the general rule. And the Labour Party rule passed in 2016 to outlaw Labour council groups making decisions contrary to central government (Tory) rules should be rescinded.

The 2011 document had little on anti-purge protections; the place of unions within the party; or on leadership elections.

Expulsions should be done only for opposing Labour in elections or for gross and damaging anti-worker, racist, sexist, or discriminatory behaviour, and only after a hearing, with prior notice of charges, with the National Constitutional Committee.

All those penalised should have the right to appeal to an autonomous appeal committee.

Suspensions of party units or individual members, or putting of CLPs into special measures, should be imposed only when risk of damage to the party's fabric makes that essential, and only with the right to a hearing

and a resolution within a short fixed time.

As regards place of unions in the Labour Party, the priority for the left is to defend the affiliate structure, and reverse the Collins report provisions downgrading the unions' role.

Other changes necessary in the union role within the Labour Party are mostly things that need to be done within the unions themselves. In the 1980s the left proposed allowing union "block" votes to be broken down so that large union delegations could allow internal minorities to vote differently, especially on issues where the union had no settled conference policy. Apparently at least one union had done that in the early 1950s.

That idea is more relevant now, with the huge block votes. As I understand it, the Labour Party now does give each union delegate separate voting credentials, rather than just one block-vote card to each general secretary. It is union custom and practice, rather than Labour rules, that union delegations vote as a block, and indeed in recent decades, on most issues, all or almost all the affiliated unions vote as a block.

The provision in the 2011 document for votes to be published is a useful corrective here.

In the 1980s the whole left used to argue that election of leader at conference was the best method. We settled for an electoral college only to take advantage of an USDAW union conference decision and thus get a majority for imperfect reform.

Given the weaknesses of conference, it would be quixotic to put energy into arguing for conference election rather than the one-member-one-vote system which was introduced by the right wing but, in 2015, blew up in their face.

**We should argue for the suppression of the non-affiliated supporter category, and for the restriction of OMOV to the leader and deputy leader and CLP NEC place elections, rather than its extension to other fields.**



# Debating the second round of the

At the 2017 AWL conference there was a debate on two opposing resolutions on the second round of the 2017 French Presidential elections. We present the speeches made in the debate by Martin Thomas and Daniel Randall. Both resolutions can be found here [bit.ly/2nRsbXc](http://bit.ly/2nRsbXc)

## Against passivity and indifference, for active politics

By Martin Thomas

**We have three points of agreement in this debate. First, that, unlike in the majority of bourgeois run-offs, there was a real difference in France on 7 May.**

For the fascist Marine Le Pen — even though as yet she lacks the base of a developed fascist party — to be elected to the great powers of the French presidency would have been worse than Macron being elected.

Second, that as a general rule we do not vote for bourgeois candidates, even if they are lesser evils in run-offs. We seek third alternatives.

Third, that it is also not an absolute rule never to vote for bourgeois candidates. There is classic Marxist precedent for voting that way in some run-offs where we have no chance to vote for labour movement candidates. .

A rule of thumb has long served in Britain, that if socialists cannot contest elections directly then we vote for “bourgeois workers’ party” candidates, and if there’s no “bourgeois workers’ party” candidate we shrug.

But it’s only a rule of thumb. As traditional electoral allegiances have loosened, some large grey areas have emerged between “bourgeois” and “bourgeois workers’ candidates”. What about the Democratic Party in Italy? It is the “party of the left”, with close informal ties with the unions, and the main

successor of the old Italian Communist Party. But it was formed by a merger with a large chunk of the old Christian Democratic Party, and deliberately named itself Democratic Party on the model of the USA’s Democrats.

What about where Green parties are more left-wing and pro-union than old social-democratic parties, and have closer links with more combative unions? What about Mélenchon in France — the main left candidate in the presidential first round, but based on a “party” which is not a party but just an email list? What about Bernie Sanders?

We need a positive principle to guide us, not just a box-ticking exercise. The principle is that at election time we go for the intervention consistent with our politics outside election times which gets most traction for the idea of an independent working-class voice in politics.

In the circumstances in France this year, activist interventions which voted for the revolutionary left candidates in the presidential first round, used a Macron vote to block Le Pen in the run-off, fomented demonstrations and mobilisations against both Macron and Le Pen throughout, and voted in the legislative elections of 11/18 June for a left-wing majority in parliament to block Macron, could and did cut against passivity and resignation.

And, at the same time, they could say everything against Macron just as well the left-wing 7 May stay-at-home brigade said it.

Abstaining or blank-voting could not, on 7 May, send a clear message. It meant the left passively submerging itself in a predictably big wave of demoralisation, indifference, resignation, and sympathy even on the left for Le Pen’s nationalism. Sometimes a shrug is, realistically, the best and clearest gesture we can make. Not on 7 May.

Some, like l’Etincelle, argued that Macron was bound to win anyway, so left-wing votes would be an unnecessary gift to him.

A Macron victory was always probable. But far from certain. The votes were fluid. When it looked like the mainstream right would withdraw Fillon as a candidate, many of his supporters said they would then vote Le Pen on the first round. The new leader of Fillon’s party, Laurent Wauquiez, pointedly refused to take sides against Le Pen on the second round.

Mélenchon refused to make a call on the second round. His supporters, in a poll, backed a blank vote, though in fact 53% of them ended up voting Macron. Opinion surveys showed up to 19% of them between rounds saying they’d vote Le Pen.

A scandal between rounds, a gaffe by Macron, could have tipped the majority of Fillon voters and a sizeable minority of Mélenchon voters to go for Le Pen. The left vote, in the broad sense of the Mélenchon voters and the abstention-minded left, could well have been big enough to determine the result. Most class-conscious workers held their noses and cast a Macron ballot on 7 May.

How could we have told them not to? Say that voting Macron would develop illusions? They would tell us that they had nothing to say in favour of Macron other than that he wasn’t Le Pen. Didn’t we agree? If we did agree, why not say it? Or do we have so little fortitude that we can’t say what we think for fear of collapse?

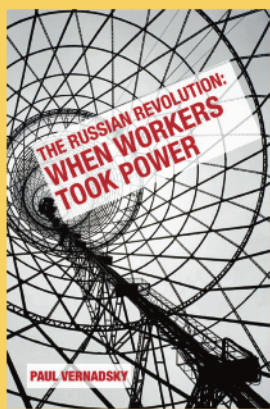
Tell them that if they voted Macron they’d end up voting for all sorts of dubiously “lesser-evil” candidates everywhere else? They would reply that if you feared that voting Macron would wreck your whole balance, you should develop more backbone.

The French leftists who did advocate not voting felt obliged to write their explanations as if there was no real difference between Le Pen and Macron.

From reading and listening to them in other contexts, I’m sure that’s not what they really thought. I’m sure that if Le Pen had won, their response the next day would not have been bland indifference.

It shows the falsity of their “line”, I think, that in order to promote their prefabricated conclusion they felt obliged to blur and obscure what they really thought — that they had to back-write their analysis and assessments to fit the prefabrication.

**And the prefabricated line, in the context, was one of passive adaptation to moods of demoralisation and indifference. Better an active intervention! And an intervention that allows consistency of ongoing political line and analysis.**



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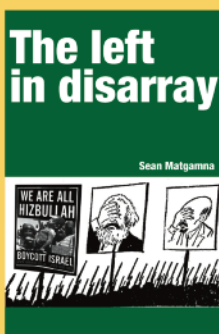
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# The French Presidential election

## Independent working-class intervention is not indifference

By Daniel Randall

The view of my side of the debate is that any intervention into the political situation around the election should have first emphasised the need for independent working-class political organisation, for the labour movement to have its own social programme, to organise against the neo-liberal attacks on workers' rights that Macron said in advance he would carry out, and, crucially, to organise independently against the Front National as a political force.

To cap that intervention by calling for a vote for the person certain to carry out those attacks, attacks that will inevitably fuel the further rise of far-right politics, would have been miseducating and disempowering.

To mobilise for a vote for a candidate in an election – and serious consideration of our position must mean that we, or an AWL-equivalent group in France, should have actively mobilised in support of a Macron vote, not merely declare him the objective lesser evil – necessarily implies some species of political confidence, however minimal.

You might vote for a bourgeois candidate whose candidacy or party is the political expression of, or in some looser way linked to, a national liberation movement or a mass social movement against a particular oppression. In doing so, you would be expressing political confidence in that element of their programme, or at least in the idea that electing them would advance that particular cause. Any such confidence in Macron would have been misplaced.

Macron was undoubtedly the lesser evil in this election, by light years. I want to emphasise this now to pre-empt and head off any claims from the other side that we think there was no essential difference between the candidates, or that our position represents an “abstentionist shrug”.

What made him the lesser evil? Simply that he was not a fascist?

In part, yes – although that's something which needs unpacking, and to which I'll return. But it was a bit more than that: one can quibble over whether the FN is exactly a fascist party, but what the election undoubtedly represented was a clash between reactionary, racist, economically and politically nationalist populism and globalising, broadly- “metropolitan” free-market capitalism.

We're not “neutral” in that clash; the latter provides a higher platform for international workers' unity and class struggle, as well as a generally greater degree of social freedom. But we do not give political confidence to the free-market bourgeoisie. We do not even trust them to consistently fight for those elements of their “programme”, to the extent it's possible to talk about such a thing, that we agree with – a more liberal attitude on social questions, for example.

History tells us that the opposite is likely: faced with a rising tide of racism and nationalism, the instinct of the metropolitan bourgeoisie is to triangulate with it, rather than confront it. Look at the record of New Labour on immigration. I have no doubt that Tony Blair's personal politics on immigration are sincerely more liberal and progressive than



Nick Griffin's, but would we have advocated giving the political confidence of a vote to Blair, had he been running as an independent, in an election against the BNP? I don't think we would have done.

No-one in the AWL, I hope, is naive about what an FN presidency would mean for working-class politics in France and indeed globally.

We have argued, including in the French run-off in 2002, that in a situation in which the votes the revolutionary left might mobilise for a right-wing bourgeois candidate were all that stood between that candidate's victory and a fascist presidency, the entire situation would look different. That's certainly true now, when the number of votes in question is much lower than it was in 2002.

### SITUATION

**“If the situation in France were different”, Martin wrote, on a better day in 2002, “and a fascist seizure of power really were an immediate risk, then the revolutionaries should be working for a general strike and the creation of workers' militias — not for a Chirac vote!”**

“In that situation, president Chirac would be likely to bring Le Pen to power — as president Hindenburg, the Social Democrats' ‘lesser evil’ against Hitler in the presidential poll in Germany in 1932, installed Hitler as Chancellor in January 1933.”

That context – that is, our working-class anti-fascism, and its distinction from the lesser-evilst, defend-the-status-quo, cross-class anti-fascism of Hope Not Hate and UAF — is an important one for this debate, which has been somewhat obscured by a more abstract focus on whether it is ever admissible to vote for bourgeois candidates.

Martin and others overstate the likelihood of a Le Pen victory. It was certainly more likely than an FN victory in 2002, but manifestly less likely than a Trump victory.

But it seems that the essential assessment we were arguing against – that if the surest way to prevent the election of a fascist is to vote for a bourgeois candidate, the left should call for that – is now being applied here too.

There is no sense in which any of us on this side of the debate are attempting to retrospectively claim that the eventual level of abstention was somehow an expression of working-class political self-assertion. No-one, to my knowledge, claimed in advance that a high level of abstention would represent this, and no-one has claimed it since.

I have little doubt that almost all class-conscious workers will have voted for Macron. The point is that for this to have been their only choice is basically a political tragedy; the efforts of any revolutionary element intervening in that scenario should be directed towards ensuring that tragedy is not repeated. That requires an emphasis on working-class independence. Building towards increased independence in the future is not served by compromising independence in the present.

Much has been made of the nature of this election as a run-off as the source of its special characteristics. But the 2002 election was also a run-off. The US presidential election was, if not technically a run-off, a de facto two-candidate election. In all cases, the labour movement and the left was able to intervene independently, or semi-independently, in the election at an earlier stage, but when that independent intervention is knocked out, is it good sense to then suspend the notion of independent intervention altogether?

The idea of intervention is key. I would not particularly characterise our position as “abstentionist”. There is no, “well, what can you do”-type shrug on our side. We're for an approach to class-conscious workers that emphasises the necessity of relying on our own forces, building them up, catalysing working-class direct action, having our movement develop its own social programme, rather than preaching faith in a wildly unreliable individual – who has his own plans for our class, which are likely to reproduce the current situation in worse conditions – to act as a bulwark against fascism.

If anything, the shrug is on the other side. “Well, we tried our independent intervention in the election, we didn't do too well, there's nothing for it now but to vote Macron”. Undoubtedly this would be presented as part of a package that also counselled independent

action, including against Macron. But those elements are compromised if they are sitting underneath a call to vote for him.

There should surely be a limit to argument by analogy, but the comparison with America is apposite. Clinton's candidacy represented something one might call “progressive” in a far more substantial sense than Macron's; within the spectrum of neoliberal bourgeois politics, she was to Macron's “left”, and the Democrats have some historic and contemporary links to organised labour. These are, of course, not links of the type that would, for us, alter their fundamental character as a bourgeois party, but they are links nonetheless. Macron and En Marche have none; indeed, organised labour and workers' rights are his explicit targets. Trump was far more likely to win than Le Pen. In a global sense, Trump's victory represents a huge setback for working-class interests. Why, then, be for a vote for the bourgeois lesser evil in a situation where the bourgeois lesser evil is politically worse; the threat of fascist, or quasi- or proto-fascist, victory is less; and the raw material, so to speak, for an independent labour movement stance was politically better developed?

We are in a new situation globally. It is true that the free-market capitalist order and metropolitan bourgeois politics face a new and stern threat from a distinct form of reactionary nationalism. As previously stated, we do acknowledge that the former is a genuine “lesser evil” from a working-class point of view. Situations like this may arise again and we should judge them soberly on their merits. Our historic positions aren't a dogma from which we can mechanically read off conclusions about current events taking place in different contexts.

But our former analyses should inform our current ones; to vote for the opposing resolution would mean a sharp pivot of policy without any adequate argument having been presented for why this situation merits that break from our traditional stances on anti-fascism in the electoral sphere.

**To vote for this position means concluding that, despite having some new and distinct features, this particular situation did not justify that pivot.**



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## Left gains at regional conferences

### LABOUR

By Micheál MacEoin

**Labour Party Regional Conferences were held in November in both London and in Blackpool in the North West and, from the reports, represent a step forward for the left of the party.**

Regional Labour Parties remain powerful, with regional directors empowered to oversee selections and regulate other democratic functions of Local Campaign Forums (LCFs) and CLPs. That is why it is important that the bodies elected to hold regional bureaucracies accountable, the Regional Boards, are comprised of left-wing and democratic-minded board members.

At the North West Regional Conference, candidates supported by the Campaign for Labour Party Democracy (CLPD) and Momentum took every seat on the Regional Board and the Conference Arrangements Committee (CAC), the body charged with overseeing the regional conference. London elects its Board members again next year.

The London Regional Conference was important both in policy terms, and in CLP and union delegates' willingness and ability to counter anti-democratic procedural chicanery from the still right-controlled CAC.

In terms of policy, around 50 motions were submitted, with Housing being by far the most popular. The composite housing motion passed brings London Region in to line with national conference policy, supporting rent controls and long-term tenancies for renters, and binding ballot rights for residents in estates up for regeneration. These policies will pile on the pressure on the already-embattled Haringey Development Vehicle (HDV), which increasingly looks



out of step with the drift of Labour Party policy locally, regionally and nationally.

Regional Board Youth representative James McAsh reports, for CLPD, that the conference was in a bolshy mood: "it was clear that members no longer accept being told what to do by their 'superiors'. Councillors who tried to defend poor decisions were politely but firmly rebuked, and when the Conference Arrangements Committee tried to deny delegates their right to debate rule changes they were challenged and easily defeated."

As of 2016, the Blair-era proscription on regional rule changes has been reversed, and it was agreed that the London Regional Conference would be annual, with CLPs and affiliates empowered to submit rule changes and motions.

Despite this, the right-controlled CAC attempted this year to prevent rule changes from being heard. This was on the spurious grounds that the Democracy Review led by the National Executive Committee was ongoing, and that any new rule changes would create a conflict. It is wrong to use the Democracy Review to rule out rule changes at Regional Conference — just as it had been wrong, following a call from the NEC, to remit the rule changes proposed at the 2017 national conference.

The Democracy Review is, potentially, an opportunity to transform the party but there is a danger it will be controlled from the top-down, and it is already being used to stifle discussion. It should not substitute for a grassroots push for democratisation at all levels of the party.

Rule changes, in the end, were accepted at the London Regional Conference, to head off a potential rebellion from delegates. Two rule changes were proposed and accepted; one, that the CAC be elected by conference delegates and not by the Regional Board and, two, that CLP and Trade Union representatives on the board be increased, with CLP representatives elected by one-member-one-vote (OMOV).

In addition to the business of the London conference, nine workshops were held on policy areas, with delegates being prepared to take a critical approach to the platform speakers (made up primarily of local councillors or Assembly Members). Fringes were organised by liberation groups, affiliates, and campaign organisations such as Momentum.

**McAsh reports one important lesson from the Youth fringe: "Don't wait for permission from your CLP to organise young people, just do it!"**

## Events

### Friday 15 December

Workers' Liberty London Forum  
7.30pm, IoE, 20 Bedford Way,  
London, WC1H 0AL  
[bit.ly/2jVp9vA](http://bit.ly/2jVp9vA)

### 15-17 December

Picturehouse weekend of action  
Across the country  
[bit.ly/2jQt9hf](http://bit.ly/2jQt9hf)

### Monday 18 December

International Day to End  
Violence Against Sex Workers  
12 noon, Houses of Parliament,  
London SW1A 0AA  
[bit.ly/2l3eP9o](http://bit.ly/2l3eP9o)

### Wednesday 20 December

Build the McStrike  
7pm, Mechanics Institute, 103  
Princess Street, Manchester M1  
6DD  
[bit.ly/2hUQilF](http://bit.ly/2hUQilF)

### Saturday 6 January 2018

Momentum Youth & Students  
London AGM  
TBC, London  
[bit.ly/2l2UX60](http://bit.ly/2l2UX60)

### 26/27 February 2018

Protest Trump's visit  
London  
[bit.ly/2iUocaK](http://bit.ly/2iUocaK)

Have an event you want listing? Email:  
[solidarity@workersliberty.org](mailto:solidarity@workersliberty.org)

## Bus drivers balloted on pay deal

**Bus drivers on Arriva North West have been balloted over an offer received from the company.**

The workers have been on strike for a pay rise and an end to pay differences between different depots. The offer comprises a two year pay deal which sees workers get a modest pay rise but differences between depots continue.

As *Solidarity* went to press (12 December) the result of the vote had not yet been published.

**Unite is recommending members reject the deal.**

## ISS outsourced workers fight back

By Gemma Short

**GMB is organising a day of action against cleaning contractor ISS at south London hospitals on Tuesday 19 December.**

Protests will take place at Queen Elizabeth Hospital, Woolwich; Kingston Hospital; Maudsley Hospital, Camberwell; Lambeth Hospital, Brixton; and Bethlem Hospital, Beckenham.

GMB says "ISS is a £9 billion, global services firm, employing cleaning, portering and security staff in many of our hospitals. But the way ISS is treating its workers — with insecure, precarious contracts and pay sometimes as low as £7.88 an hour — takes the \*ISS."

Workers at Liverpool Royal and Broadgreen Hospitals are also fighting against ISS. ISS has limited



sick pay to 12 days a year.

**Workers, with their union, Unite, and the support of the local Labour Party has been organising stalls and protests at the hospitals.**

• London protests: [bit.ly/2BVavw4](http://bit.ly/2BVavw4)



# Charlton Park Academy workers show the way to win

**By Patrick Murphy (NEU-NUT Executive, personal capacity)**

In October *Solidarity* reported on the decision by teachers and support staff employed at Charlton Park Academy to strike in opposition to significant threats to their terms and conditions.

Their unions, the GMB and the National Education Union (NEU) were planning a series of escalating strikes to ensure that the sick pay provisions they had were protected and made available to all staff. Since Charlton Park Academy (CPA) became an academy in 2012, new staff were no longer protected by national terms and conditions (Burgundy and Green Book). These staff employed on the new Academy contract saw serious reductions in their sick pay entitlements. Staff became aware of the situation when one teacher who had experienced an industrial injury and was

off work discovered she was only entitled to four weeks' sick pay and had to pay her rent using a credit card. The good news is that after months of action including six days of strikes, GMB and NEU members can claim victory in their dispute. Burgundy and Green book conditions have been won for all staff beginning on 1 December 2017. Once again the lessons of this victory are that determined, well-organised action which seeks to involve as many workers as possible in the activities around the strike is the most effective way to force a retreat from a stubborn management.

## STRIKES

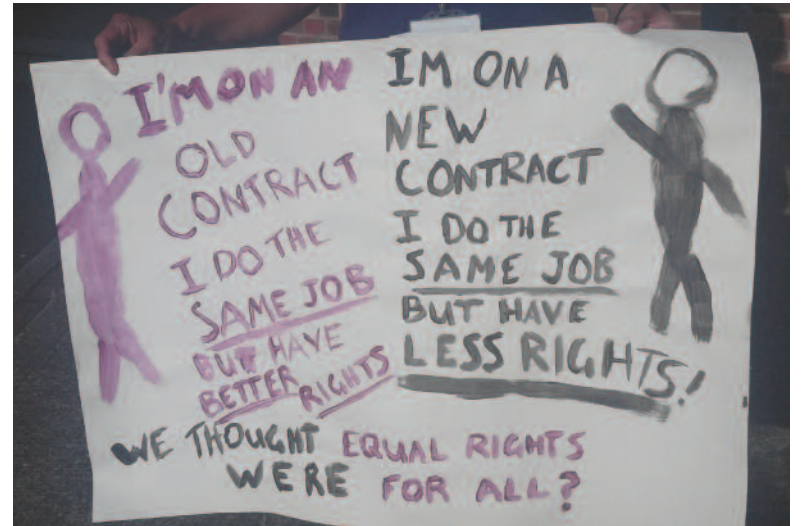
**The strikes began in July 2017 and involved both NEU and GMB members, with over 90 staff at the school taking part.**

Pickets have been vibrant and determined, and have excellent support from the local community including Greenwich and Bexley Trades Council and Labour MP

Matthew Pennycook. Alongside this, local Labour councillors, Gary Parker, John Fahy, Chris Kirby and others have been key in exerting pressure on the Head and Governing Body to resolve the dispute.

On Wednesday 29 November, after three weeks of ACAS talks, agreement was reached between all parties to secure Burgundy and Green Book rights for all staff with the proviso of a trial period to monitor its implementation. The Governing Body have also agreed to adopt Greenwich Policies on Sickness Absence, including Workplace Injury, which puts them in line with other schools in the Borough. A Joint Negotiating Committee (JNC) of all trade unions has also been agreed to ensure that industrial relations can proceed in a culture of respect and transparency.

A joint statement from the Greenwich GMB and NEU announced that "We are immensely proud of the unity and dedication of GMB and NEU members and what we



have achieved together. We have shown that unity is strength and that an injury to one is an injury to all".

**Local activists and members of both unions are right to be proud of this unity and dedication. They should also be proud**

**of the way they took the dispute into the local trade union movement and the Labour Party and the way they used their contacts in the national unions to raise funds to ensure that support staff were financially backed during a lengthy dispute.**

# 'Star Wars' strikes to hit Picturehouse

**By a Picturehouse worker**

**Workers at five Picturehouse cinemas will be striking on 14, 24, 26 December.**

14 December is the opening day of 'Star Wars', the biggest movie of the year. Last year Picturehouse made a large percentage of their profits during the opening weeks of 'Star Wars: Rogue One'. Workers from all five Picturehouse sites on strike, and their supporters, will be demonstrating outside Hackney Picturehouse on 14 December from 4pm.

Hackney Picturehouse, one of the busier sites, is going to be ram packed with customers that day. We hope our demonstration will draw enough attention that we can turn away a significant enough amount of customers and/or at least have a significant enough ef-

fect on those who have chosen to cross our picket line that they will consider looking up and supporting our movement.

On Christmas eve, many other businesses would close up and give their staff time to go back home for Christmas day and see the family. Picturehouse have refused to allow this and has previously scheduled strikers to work over Christmas, so this strike will give strikers the time off they deserve. Boxing day is a big day in the cinema calendar. Lots of big movies get released on this day. When we withdraw our labour on this day, the cinema operations will be significantly disrupted even with scab labour. The management will find it difficult to keep these cinemas running.

Picturehouse are finding it difficult to keep up with our strikes. Every time we go on strike, the

management has to spend money bringing in undertrained scab labour, close down the bars and kitchens (where they make a significant amount of money), and spend money on the expenses of managers drafted in from external sites. Picturehouse, so afraid of more workers joining the union, have instigated a hiring freeze and in doing so are putting more pressure on managers who have to take up the slack. Many managers have left our site, explaining that the strikes and the pressure from head office is causing them stress and anxiety. Picturehouse would rather continue to harm its own business than give us the right to form a union and a Living Wage.

**They cannot limp on like this forever. They will have to negotiate with us. We are ready for the long fight.**



# We will not work for free!

**By a civil servant**

**On 4-5 December, PCS members in DVSA, an agency within Department for Transport, struck.**

The strike concerns whether you should be paid for all your work related activities, in particular travel time between workplaces. Presently DfT will only pay for a certain amount of the time spent travelling. The union of course wants all the travel time to be paid.

The strike overall was well supported but there are clear areas where the union has to work to improve the turnout next time.

The next, and in some ways more important phase of the dispute centres on the work to contract.

DfT introduced a new form of driving test on the 4 December, over the strong objections from the union. The department wants a fixed number of tests to be carried out within the working day. The problem is that this cannot be readily done, so many Driving Examiners will find themselves not being able to "fit" the last test into the working day. They will be forced either to cancel this test (which is what working to con-

tract will mean) or take the test but work "overtime" for no extra pay. The test itself also has dangerous features that are supposed to mimic real world driving but will increase the chances of accidents. Working to contract means stopping a test if the candidate is driving dangerously.

Therefore the work to contract will mean many cancelled and stopped tests, all of which hit DVLA's bottom line.

The government has demanded that PCS end the dispute before it will start talks aimed at resolving the dispute. PCS has rightly rejected that demand. Interestingly the Labour Party has now intervened and written to the DfT Secretary of State saying that talks must start without any preconditions.

Given the specific nature of the dispute it is probable that it cannot be escalated to the rest of the department but nevertheless the wider union can and must show solidarity even if only in the form of fund raising. The dispute can be won, but it probably will be a long struggle.

**In principle, if you carry out a work related activity, then you should be paid for it. No free work should be allowed.**

# Engineering workers ballot over Scrooge bosses

**From Tubeworker**

**London Underground gives additional payments to, or makes special arrangements for, workers in many departments for working over Christmas and Boxing Day.**

The unions' ongoing battles for fair working practises for drivers on Boxing Day are well known.

But Asset Operations (engineering) workers have no additional payment or any other form of recognition or remuneration for working over these days, despite the obvious impact on work/life balance.

That's why RMT members in

Asset Operations are balloting for strikes to demand parity with other workers who have access to additional payments or special arrangements for Christmas/Boxing Day working. Their strike ballot closes on 12 December.

We'd like to see RMT spread the (festive) spirit of this dispute to other areas. Station staff have to work Christmas Eve and Boxing Day without any additional payments, as do cleaners.

**All workers should have the right to social and family time at Christmas if they want it, so let's hope the Asset Operations dispute is the launchpad for a wider fight.**

## Strikes for pay parity

**Train maintainers and maintenance and stores workers at Ruislip Transplant Depot have voted for strikes to win pay parity.**

Workers are being paid unequally for doing the same work, and workers who do train prep work and sign off trains as fit for service are being denied the associated pay enhancement.

**With LU looking to cut train prep times and possibly reduce jobs, winning this struggle could put us at an advantage.**





# Solidarity

For a workers' government

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## Against Trump, fight for a real two-states deal for Palestine

By Rosalind Robson

**Donald Trump's recognition of Jerusalem as Israel's capital – and by strong implication the whole of Jerusalem including the eastern, occupied and Palestinian, part of the city – has been rightly condemned.**

It is largely a symbolic move. Russia recognised (West) Jerusalem as Israel's capital in April 2017, but no other country, surely no EU country, is likely to follow the example of Putin and Trump.

This was, however, a very powerful symbolic move, a staggering act of vandalism against the prospect of peace talks in which the status of Jerusalem will be decided as part of a long-term settlement.

It which will galvanise and boost the majority of Israeli legislators who support the idea of a "united Jerusalem" (i.e. the whole of Jerusalem) as Israel's capital. Some link that "principle" to support for some kind of two-state solution in Israel-Palestine, others do not.

Why has Trump made this move? It has been said that he wishes to appease US Christian fundamentalists who believe "giving back" the Holy City of Jerusalem to the Jews in the partial enactment of a prophecy. Such a motivation is always a possibility with Trump.

More likely there has been some kind of diplomatic agreement between the US and Israel's current Likud-led coalition government. Or maybe Trump's boast that this move will help secure the "ultimate peace deal" simply suits Israel. It will certainly end the hiatus in peace talks (last attempted in 2013-14), but not by actually resuming peace talks. Instead, by metaphorically smashing the Palestinians over the head.

It pushes towards a bad and an imposed deal. It indicates something like the permanent loss of East Jerusalem, or most of it, continued militarisation of the West Bank, intact and even expanded Israeli settlements in the West Bank. And this is the "ultimate peace deal"? It would be a peace deal like no other, that's for sure. Not a

"peace" deal and not a "deal". It would condemn the Palestinians to a permanent status of occupation and statelessness.

Trump is also doing Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu a personal political favour. In recent weeks he has been troubled by mass demonstrations against corruption in his government. The last demonstration on 9 December in Tel Aviv numbered 10,000 (a very big demonstration for Israel). Netanyahu is himself under criminal investigation. There are two accusations against him. The first involves receiving gifts from businessmen, the second involves negotiating a deal with a newspaper owner for better coverage in return for curbs on a rival daily.

Making deals for short-term gain is second nature to both Trump and Netanyahu. The Jerusalem announcement may give Netanyahu the chance to salvage his reputation, and big himself up as a national and populist leader. In addition, many of his opponents on the corruption issue are from the Labor Party / Zionist Union, and a result on the



Jerusalem issue will undermine their, recently revived, campaign around a two-state solution. That said, Labor leader Avi Gabay's support for a "united Jerusalem" should dismiss any idea that Labor can deliver a democratic and just settlement.

Shortly after Trump's announcement Netanyahu visited the EU headquarters in Brussels where in a speech he claimed, "recognising reality [i.e. that Jerusalem was the capital of Israel] is the substance of peace." Most EU leaders were not impressed and were vocally against the notion that East Jerusalem should be lost for the Palestinians.

Possibly Netanyahu had calculated that some right-wing EU leaders, in the Czech Republic and Hungary, would give support to the Jerusalem initiative. So far, those leaders have failed to do so,

or perhaps cannot yet see how their interests, as part of the EU bloc, square with support for Trump.

As the US made this announcement, they and the Israelis openly expected days of protests in Palestinian territories and elsewhere in the Middle East. They also expected the protests to eventually calm after no little state repression, and as we go to press this is happening. That the limited backlash was part of their cynical calculation shows how they build their policies on a level of despair and hopelessness among Palestinians.

**Socialists have a duty to reassert our solidarity with the Palestinian people, based on ending Israel's occupation of Palestinian territories including East Jerusalem, and a democratic two-states solution in Israel-Palestine.**

## Protest Trump's visit to the UK

Trump may visit the UK on the weekend of the 26 or 27 February. The Stop Trump coalition will be organising protests. Local planning events are already being set up — find out more or set up your own event: [bit.ly/2jBgZMO](http://bit.ly/2jBgZMO)

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